

The Practice of the Text: Arts of Conversation, Arts of Writing

Angharad Saunders

Introduction

Barton and Hamilton assert that literacy is a social practice; it links the activities of reading and writing with the social contexts in which they are embedded and which they assist in shaping.¹ An awareness of this pervades current endeavours within textual geography, where attention to the practices of production and reception are seen as revealing the spatialities and authorities of knowing.² It is an attention which tends to coalesce around the reading encounters and formal productions of geographical texts, yet within these analyses limited consideration has, so far, been directed to the practice of writing, and more specifically, to its historicised, cultural practice.

This is partly because of the assumption that writing is solipsistic in nature and that, unlike other practices, few writers are likely to reflect on writing in writing.³ The textual traces through which past practices are registered reveal their fragility when writing is itself problematised. Indeed, the historicised practice of writing will always come to us through the guise of finished creations, making it difficult to realise the human agency at the core of all documents. Furthermore, as Hamilton points out in the context of photography, visual, and by implication textual, artefacts of literacy practices are always partial.⁴ Thus, to gain access to the intimate milieu of the writer, to the way in which they put thoughts and ideas to paper, is to engage both with the vagaries of subjectivity and the absences which pervade the written text.

One way of approaching this is to take the practice of writing as an event which is interwoven within a wider linguistic system. As Barton and Hamilton suggest, analysing literacy events allow the complexity of practices to be appreciated. The practices of reading, writing and speaking are not independent of one another but are complicit within one another.⁵ Consequently, this paper begins to explore this idea through an event which occurred over the weekend of 27 October 1899, at the house of the dramatist-author Eden Phillpotts.

Phillpotts was a well-known writer in literary circles, having written several successful novels and plays throughout the 1890s. In October 1899 he

Angharad Saunders is a Senior Lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Glamorgan. *Historical Geography* Volume 36 (2008): 94-111. ©2008, Historical Geography Specialty Group, Association of American Geographers.

invited the author, editor and journalist Arnold Bennett to spend the weekend with him and his family in Torquay, Devon. Bennett, by contrast, was still in the early stages of his literary career, but this weekend emerged as something of an inspirational watershed in his writing career. As he recorded, he found his own creativity start to develop when in the companionship of Phillpotts,⁶ for they were able to talk incessantly about their work and literature whilst enjoying the solitude of one another's company.

This paper takes this weekend as a moment, an event through which to begin to explore the historicised practice of writing and its role in the circulation of literary knowledge. It suggests that the conversations Bennett and Phillpotts shared were central to Bennett's writing. Talking was a creative impetus central to his method of writing. It offered opportunities for reflection, discussion and the development of ideas, which, in turn, played a transformative role in Bennett's compositional approach and thus also to the cultural meanings contained therein. At the same time, it intimates that the linguistic system, of which writing and speaking are a part, is enmeshed within more expressly spatial practices which illuminate the centrality of affect within the written world.

Writing Practice

In 1920 the writer and academic Arthur Quiller-Couch published a series of lectures entitled *On the Art of Writing*. This compilation was intended to address what Quiller-Couch saw as an omission in literary studies, namely that literature as art necessitated practising as well as pondering. It needed to be kept alive, supple and active. Central to this, he suggested, was recognising writing's sociability—writing was not a hermetic activity, but rather, a practice rooted within communicative orality: “Do not forget that the printed book—the written word—presupposes a speaking voice, and must ever have at its back some sense in us of the speaking voice.”⁷

Quiller-Couch elucidates the conjunctive praxis between writing and speaking; to write is also to speak. In the early twentieth-century, this elision was given credence by a growing interest in writing and authorship. Influence studies reveal the prevalence of writing communities at this time, with groups like the Inklings, the Bloomsbury group and the Rye circle, perceiving discussion as central to textual creativity and development.⁸ Such dialogue was not solely confined to established authors. As Waller has shown, this was a period of mass literacy, the majority of the population could read, but they could also write and they were choosing to demonstrate this in increasingly visible ways.⁹ Moreover, it was a period which witnessed what Hilliard has described as the democratization of writing.¹⁰ This creative process did not intuitively appear though, instead it was stimulated and encouraged through burgeoning writers' circles, guilds, correspondence courses and textual guides which discussed and

explored with the aspirant author the best writing practices to adopt and refine. In short, such groups advised as to how to write, what to write about and whom to write for. These questions motivated not only the narrow circles of academia, but society more broadly.

There is then a growing awareness of the importance of writing practice at this time, but it is an interest which remains disembodied. The writer is removed from the immediate context of their own creativity and their writing processes. This is endorsed within studies of professional and popular influence, where writers are portrayed as mediations not actively feeling, sensing beings. As Longhurst observes, this in many ways represents the usual approach in western scholarship where the mind/body dualism has remained resilient.¹¹ Creativity is thus seen to reside in and between minds, whereas the body is merely an inert container. The body though is never merely the interface of encounter, it is always the focus. It is the body after all which enters place and, in turn, place the body.

Notwithstanding such acknowledgements, recovering the lived sociality of writing, which is so central to Quiller-Couch's conception of writing practice, is potentially fraught with complexity. One way of penetrating this density suggests itself in Shotter's work on the non-representational nature of language.¹² Language, Shotter argues, is not a system of objective rules, but a contested activity which affects our communication and our passions and leads us to construct new ways of being within the world. It is through conversation that we become critically involved in the world; through our dialogic meetings with self and other we are embedded within a "flow of spontaneously unfolding, reciprocally responsive inter-corporeal, inter-activity" where the meaning and significances of life accrue.¹³

By exploring the practice of writing through its relationship with conversation—through the way authors talk, discuss and seek inspiration for their work—it becomes possible to access the intimate sphere of the writer and begin to appreciate the vigour of writing and the cultural knowledges it promotes and circulates. Again, there are epistemological problems with this approach, namely the paucity and partiality of registered conversations. However, where vestiges of authorial conversation and literary reflection exist, there is scope for embarking on a richly critical exploration of the historicised practice of writing.

Writing Geography

There is an enduring geographical interest in the practice of textual knowledge which draws inspiration from the histories of science that concern themselves with the way ideas travel and transform.¹⁴ In this it coalesces quite tellingly around the materiality of reception and production, with the former exploring the practices of reading and the latter a suite of editorial practices.

Together this scholarship is formative in moving textual geography from abstract, representational and receptive preoccupations, predicated upon a sense of stability between a text and its contexts, to more equivocal, animate understandings of textuality and its role in the constitution of geographical meaning.

This set of approaches furnishes two interrelated avenues of geographical praxis; a concern with the performative, affective nature of reading and an interest in the structural aesthetics and presentation of the written word. Despite their inherent connections, a sense of absence pervades this relationship. Before reading can take place, texts must be produced. Whilst scholars attend to the material production of texts in terms of editing, publishing, layout, styles and typefaces,¹⁵ and to the discussions implicit within a text through citations and footnotes,¹⁶ there remains a *lacuna* in our thinking about the nature of authorial writing, not least within the realm of literature.

It should not be imputed from this that there is a paucity of interest in the practice of writing; rather, that interest has tended to be muted and disparate. Part of the reason for this arises from the semantic richness of both practice and writing. One overriding interpretative tradition, encapsulated in Lodge's work, is to regard the practice of writing as an exploration of the narrative conventions, strategies and innovations an author employs.¹⁷ This is a beguiling approach for it moves beyond the superficialities of a text to reach into the persuasive depth of the literary structure and thus poses the question of how a text does what it does. Inevitably, this informs much textual work amongst geographers, where rhetorical compositions occlude rhetorical practice.¹⁸

This structural approach is complemented by more situated understandings of practice, which, impelled by disciplinary interests in space seek to theorise the sites of writing praxis.¹⁹ Here context prevails as the explanatory device for authenticating knowing, masking the vagaries of human action. Contextual change translates into substantive change, but the result, according to Reynolds is the inertia of the text. It lacks its own dynamic independent of its external relationships.²⁰

The practice of writing has therefore been subjected to an array of approaches. Yet all fail to address the sense in which writing is an active, supple human practice. According to Barnett, this caveat arises from the indiscriminate geographical preoccupation with spatial context. Context is normalised as the bounded space of textual explanation.²¹ However, writing is an iterative and reiterative process which belies contextual pluralism, and so necessitates conceptualisation as a mobile, open practice. This indicates that the practice of writing cannot be understood through singular sites or individuals; rather, creativity needs to be appreciated as emerging from what Reynolds terms the spatial practices of the everyday: talking, walking, mapping and dwelling.²²

Attempts to address this are evident in recent work in book history

and influence studies, where the interwoven practices of printing, writing, reading and speaking are furnishing a rich, scalar geography of the text. Histories of print and reading recognise the centrality of conversation to the formulation and communication of meaning, tending to observe how a sense of collectivity helps to rigorously defend and even enhance the veracity of individuals' ideas.²³ Acknowledging that writing is interwoven within a complex of encouragement, admonition, opposition and reassurance heightens the vibrancy of creative practice,²⁴ and thus begins to hint at the enacted spatiality of the text.

However, as the discipline of book history suggests, the connection between speaking and writing is far from uniform.²⁵ There is, as Johns observes, an intrinsic geography of persuasion at play in the relationship between oral and textual practices, wherein influence varies as the spaces and cultures of social groupings alter.²⁶ Consequently, any understanding of writing practice must attend to the spaces of praxis and their prevailing literary cultures. Yet there is scope for a more animated understanding of this geography, one which registers not only the significance of conversation but its active livedness.

In his recent work on eighteenth-century writing practices, Ogborn hints at a greater vivacity, considering both the locality of writing and the everyday networks and transmissions it is implicated within.²⁷ This symbiotic approach allows Ogborn not only to identify the indivisibility of writing from other textual practices, but, even more significantly, it also allows for the articulation of how these cohere to configure imperial space. In this, Ogborn attends to the traces and manifestations of local orality, where its printed expression is intrinsic to the contestation and control of space and to meaning within lived space. Exposing this orality helps enliven historical space, revealing the cultures which actively shape its textuality.

The recursive intimacy this tradition identifies, between writing and orality, imparts a powerful sense of writing as a spatialised cultural practice. Yet, it is a tradition which encounters difficulties in conveying the full immediacy and motive agency of orality to writing practice. The fleetingness of the spoken word permits only a spectral presence within the text; orality is a trace, a hint, a mediation of the act of speaking. Consequently, the practice of writing can only be recovered through its artefacts. It is through the finished creations of writing that practice reveals itself. Recovering the embodied practice of writing—its long duration, the continual circulation of thoughts, conceptions, refinements and revisions, its discursiveness—requires further exploration.

This paper attends to this vacuity by examining the way in which the conversations that took place between Eden Phillpotts and Arnold Bennett informed Bennett's writing at the cusp of the twentieth century. It suggests that conversation helps reveal the circulation of ideas and inspirations which initiate and sustain the practice of writing. At the same time, it is keenly aware

that practices are far from geographically dislocated. As practices transform they become geographically rooted, but this is also to deny the mobility of both writing practices and texts. Where Ogborn addresses this through an attention to how writing travels, here the sensory act of walking within the world provides a way of excavating the mobile geographies of writing practice. In line with work by Barton and Hamilton,²⁸ what follows attempts to shift thinking about writing from a practice which operates in, to a practice which operates through self and space. Practices are therefore understood to emerge through social relationships.

Unlike other work within geography, this paper is concerned not with the role of broadly scientific writing within disciplinary histories and knowledges, but rather, with the practice of literary writing. As Wood observes, literature is not socially superfluous; it knows things, it probes the evanescent nature of life and the doubt and uncertainty at its core—ways of being which manifest themselves in the very practice of writing.²⁹

Arnold Bennett: The Practitioner

Arnold Bennett was born in 1867 in Hanley, Staffordshire, in the north west of England. The son of a provincial solicitor, he rejected a job in the family business and moved to London in 1888 to pursue a literary career. He is best known for his series of novels, published between 1910 and 1916, about lower-middle class life in the Staffordshire Potteries, a region encompassing the six towns of Hanley, Burslum, Tunstall, Stoke, Longton and Fenton, an area renowned for its china industries.³⁰ It is this period which marked the apogee of Bennett's literary success, but more significantly, it also coincided with the vigorous debates that were developing over effective writing practice.

Given his literary achievements in this period it is of little surprise that Bennett chose to intervene in these wider discussions over writing practice, publishing in 1914 his guide to writing, *The Author's Craft*. This text articulates Bennett's approach to writing and the experiential and observational faculties necessary to its successful execution. As he observes, writing is about being in the world. The novelist should embrace all phenomena in his curiosity, "the whole spectacular and sensual show—what the eye sees, the ear hears, the nose scents, the tongue tastes and the skin touches—is a cause or an effect of human conduct."³¹

Bennett rests this sensory perception and the creativity it fosters upon an intuitive spatiality, asserting that "geographical knowledge is the mother of discernment....[It is] the sole direct terrestrial influence determining the evolution of original vital energy."³² The capacity to write emerges from direct, spatialised, bodily experiences, or what Casey terms, the "coming in of places into the body."³³ It is not a reclusive practice, but encompasses the entirety of

human interaction with people and place. To write about life is simultaneously to sense it, to live it, to be in its midst. It is only through this being within the world that the creativity, veracity and integrity of literature can be fully communicated. Thus, in 1914 Bennett confidently articulates the importance of consciously being within the world as intrinsic to writing practice.

Yet, in looking toward Bennett's early career this confidence is absent, intimating that rather than being innate, Bennett's writing practice was developed and refined over many years. When he joined Eden Phillpotts in October 1899 he was still very much a novice author. He had produced two works of fiction, perhaps the most notable being *A Man from the North* (1898) and had completed and abandoned the first draft of *Anna Tellwright*, which was later to be published as *Anna of the Five Towns* and would mark his recognised entry into the literary world. However, as the nineteenth-century drew to a close Bennett was sustaining himself primarily through his editing and journalistic work within London.

In this context, the weekend Bennett spends with Phillpotts stands as something of a formative moment in the development of Bennett's penmanship. As Curry asserts, many of the everyday practices we engage in are done intuitively, we rarely think about them as we do them.³⁴ Yet, this weekend forces Bennett to contemplate his actual practices. Through the mediated social and spatial practices of another author, Bennett is able to reflect upon his writing, upon what he writes and how he writes. Indeed, as Carter and McCarthy demonstrate, creativity is not an aesthetic production, but emanates from "intimate and dialogic conditions" where "interpersonal and affective exchanges" abound.³⁵ Hence, as Bennett retrospectively records in his journal, his stay with Phillpotts in October 1899 is replete with such opportunities and encounters: "I had not been long with [Phillpotts] before I found my own creative ideas begin to flow under the impulsion of his companionship."³⁶ Through their talks Bennett and Phillpotts together transform Bennett's writing practice.

Phillpotts was a voracious writer. From the early 1890s he had produced, on average, one work of fiction per year. As Bennett was to discover on his first evening with Phillpotts, this was the result of a distinct authorial practice:

Talking of work, Phillpotts said that he worked at his serious stuff from 10.30 or 11 to 1, and sometimes in the afternoon again for an hour or so, after going for a walk. That is all.³⁷

This illuminates a certain perturbation on Bennett's part at such implied effortlessness, an effortlessness which is further exaggerated as Bennett elucidates Phillpotts's disciplined approach to writing. Phillpotts aims to "write 600,000 words in the year" and every month interrupts "the big work, to write a short story, which would take 2 or 3 or 4 days."³⁸ In contrast, Bennett regu-

larly experiences periods of what he terms creative indolence, where progress is slow and novels are abandoned.³⁹ To gain insight into an authorial practice very distinct from his own and to discover such measured efficiency is therefore somewhat bewildering to Bennett.

Shotter argues that to talk in new ways, or to talk about ideas in new ways, is to construct new social relationships and ways of being in the world.⁴⁰ This is precisely what Bennett, through his discussion with Phillpotts, is creating. Without wishing to imply too much, it is evident that Bennett is beginning to conceptualise writing in a way quite new to him. As Drabble observes, Bennett was a long admirer of the French naturalist school of writing which cohered around the work of Zola and Balzac.⁴¹ This saw literature as an art form, wherein the authenticity of character and description was emphasised over a contrived plot. Bennett had tried emulating this literary style with limited success. It was Phillpotts who encouraged him to be more supple in his textual practice, to try new forms and ways of writing.

The efficacy of Phillpotts's authorship is working to dispel the aura of creative exclusivity surrounding writing and in its place the merest suggestion is emerging that to write can be a banal practice. Writing is not dependent upon an artistic inclination which exhaustively details people and place, but upon an awareness of the need for a methodical engagement with the world and with work. It is an approach Bennett finds highly appealing:

I have now decided to act on Phillpotts's advice, to write a short story every month. I finished my November story this month: 'The Phantom Sneeze,' a humorous ghost tale, 4,500 words.⁴²

Through the intimacies of dialogue Bennett is introduced to and explores practices very different from his own. Yet, there is a more immanent creativity at play within the interstices of conversation. Where those working within the Chomskian tradition see creativity as residing within the incessant novelty grammar produces,⁴³ language is similarly pregnant with conceptual creativity. As Carter demonstrates, language is highly ingenious in that it has the ability to create space through its articulation and codification.⁴⁴ It is a persuasive practice which has the capacity to make anew, to order and reorder the world. This inventiveness does not reside within language per se but is instead made meaningful through linguistic acts which bring language into the social world. Linguistic meaning, as Shotter remarks, does "not come from a mysterious god on high, but only from other life, in an unbroken chain of creativity that occurs whenever two or more living forms meet, and actively 'rub up against' each other."⁴⁵

Consequently, to talk is not merely to speak, but to engage rhetorically with the social world, to listen, respond and develop new ways of seeing and experiencing. It is through conversation that ideas are elucidated and de-

veloped. As Bennett observes, it is a creative and inspirational practice:

Every night we have had long literary talks, in which I did rather more than half of the talking....Phillpotts often spoke of these 'shoppy' talks with the greatest pleasure. He said they were a sharp stimulant—a stimulant he seldom got.⁴⁶

These conversational engagements suggest a subtle pressure at work in Bennett's understanding of textual space. Through them Bennett comes to learn of the influence De Quincy and Hardy have had on Phillpotts's style, of Phillpotts's admiration for the intricate management of complex sentences, of his belief in the usefulness of the short story, his detestation of the romantic convention and his conviction that his characters can know places more intimately than he himself.⁴⁷ The text is being presented as open, pragmatic and capacious, perhaps initiating Bennett's later assertion as to writing's needful worldliness: "the notion that art is first and the rest of the universe nowhere is bound to lead to preciosity and futility in art."⁴⁸

Writing is a social act taking place in social spaces, which, for Bennett and Phillpotts, is infused and given meaning by conversation. Their conversation helps co-produce what Carter and McCarthy perceive as a shared world of creative intimacy and alignment of viewpoint.⁴⁹ Bennett's artistic conception of textual space is challenged and transformed by Phillpotts's more practical, less encumbered approach to writing. As Bennett records in *The Author's Craft*, writing is all about poaching, colonising and annexing the work and ideas of others.⁵⁰ Conversation, too, is integral to this reciprocity.

Consequently, textual space is forged as a space of convergence and mutuality. Whilst a text can be attributed to an individual the ideas that pervade it, the structure and form it takes are fundamentally stimulated and influenced by the ideas of others. In establishing a discursive community of shared intellectual and aesthetic appreciations, Bennett and Phillpotts endorse confidence in one another's artistic opinions, positioning writing as collaborative in nature. Literacy is more than an independent action and literacy creations are more than the practices of an individual.⁵¹ Writing is a process of exchange and adaptation, a circular practice wherein authority is subject to constant alteration.

In asserting that conversation is creative, Carter and McCarthy perceive this creativity to be indistinguishable from the social spaces of its production.⁵² Conversation is inherently geographical, and whilst this is recognised in the practices and powers of linguistic translation and dialogue as a narrative convention,⁵³ the embodied geography of conversation remains somewhat under-theorised. The implicit dialogues which inspire and underpin a text are not placeless. Rather, their inherent spatiality inflects the conversation and its textual significance.

It is widely recognised that the place of writing influences the nature

of writing in style, content and form.⁵⁴ As Farish observes, writings which took place on the frontline during the First World War blend linear and fragmentary styles in an effort to reflect the complexities of place and experience.⁵⁵ The practice of writing is similarly located, but to think of writing as taking place in one fixed locale where the actual action of putting pen to paper occurs is a little misleading. Writing is more diffuse. It is practised across space and emerges from an author's encounters with, and articulations of, the world.

Walking helps elucidate this spatiality, for as Solnit observes, it is not merely a mode of travel but a mode of composition; it is through walking that ideas are formulated, articulated and refined.⁵⁶ The walk is seen as opening up a space of experiential creativity where the individual encounters and responds to the landscape both conceptually and practically.⁵⁷ Phillpotts had long subscribed to this belief, punctuating his daily writing with a brief amble. Similarly, Bennett's journal is replete with references to his rambles around the country and to the reflective and inspirational nature of these excursions: "I walked a good deal about Paris yesterday, arranging instalment 4 of 'Hugo.' I got down, via the quays, as far as Luxembourg."⁵⁸

Thus, Solnit is apt in remarking that to walk is both a simple act of engagement and a complex process of contemplation. It is to fuse the physical world and the world of ideas in creative stimulation.⁵⁹ Yet walking is not solely an individual practice, as Anderson clearly points out. It is a practice through which conversation and ideas travel.⁶⁰ This Phillpotts and Bennett discover during their weekend together, when they spend much of their time walking within the locality of Torquay.

At this time, Torquay was a small town, situated on Britain's Devonshire coast, midway between Plymouth and Exeter, and fringed by the bleak inland landscape of Dartmoor. Several walks in these environs are given specific mention by Bennett, a saunter to Teignmouth, an excursion to Crompton and an amble to Torquay. Whilst Bennett does not record, per se, the conversations he and Phillpotts had during these wanders, he does impart the topics on which they held forth: botany, dreams, social hierarchies and locations for future novels. It is the first which is, strangely enough, most illuminating. Whilst walking along the river from Teignmouth, just north of Torquay inland to Newton Abbot, Bennett is struck by Phillpotts's extensive botanical knowledge, commenting upon his deep engagement with his surroundings and his ability to note and know even the rarest of wildlife.⁶¹

Through walking Phillpotts displayed a detailed local knowledge. It is a knowledge which imparted a sense of intimacy, familiarity and symbiosis with the landscape. He experiences what Wylie terms a folding and unfolding of self and world; the individual is part of, but simultaneously registers, the world.⁶² This engaged awareness with locality makes it unsurprising that Phillpotts is regarded as the authorial voice of the region. By comparison, Bennett's evident surprise at the intensity of Phillpotts's knowledge and his en-

gement with his surroundings is suggestive of a certain detachment on Bennett's part to the world.

This is something Lucas identifies as characteristic of much of Bennett's early work. In his first novel, *A Man from the North* (1898), there is a notable lack of depth in terms of both character and place.⁶³ There is a sense in which Bennett is always trying to put a clear distance between himself and life. As Woolf wrote in 1925, does he not catch "life just an inch or two short on the wrong side?"⁶⁴ In Bennett's early novels life escapes him. There is little feeling for the subtleties and details of living; his characters think but do not engage.

Whilst it is erroneous to imply that Bennett became more observant to detail as a result of this exchange and encounter with the world, it is illuminating to note his renewed interest in his work on his return to London. Here he revisited *Anna Tellwright*, a novel on which he had last worked in April:

I have been reading through the draft of 'Anna Tellwright.' It came fresh to me. Some involutions of the plot I had quite forgotten....[T]he end will have to be approached more slowly; it needs to be 'prepared'; and when it comes it must be described with much greater detail.⁶⁵

In his early writings local places abound, but their appearance is somewhat rigid and inanimate. In *A Man from the North* experience clings to the exterior of the protagonist, Richard Larch, but never seemingly penetrates his consciousness:

The streets of Bursley were nearly empty as he walked through the town from the railway station, for the industrial population was already at work in the manufactories, and the shops not yet open. Yet Richard avoided the main thoroughfares, choosing a more circuitous route.⁶⁶

Larch existed within the town, but he did not register this existence in any meaningful, affective way.

By contrast, while *Anna Tellwright* suffers from equally evasive techniques there is a growing sense of conscious engagement with the landscape:

Here was a sample of the total and final achievement towards which the thousands of small, disjointed efforts that Anna had witnessed, were directed....As Anna looked...at a pile of tea-sets, she found it difficult even to conceive that, a fortnight or so before, they had been nothing but lumps of dirty clay. No stage of the manufacture was credible by itself, but the result was incredible.⁶⁷

A sense of distance remains, but Anna is beginning to emerge as an engaged character, experiencing and registering the world around her.

This development in practice cannot be attributed merely to Bennett's weekend walking and talking with Phillpotts. To do so would be to over-determine a minor exchange within a much wider folding of experience. However, to disregard this exchange is equally deterministic, particularly when we remember Barton and Hamilton's assertion that any literacy practice is interwoven within a wider linguistic system.⁶⁸ The conversation, and its occurrence during a walk, is revealing precisely because it displays Bennett's awe at new ways of seeing and being within the world. Insight comes, as he notes, when it is "comprehended that the rôle of the observer is not passive but active."⁶⁹

Bennett's place epiphany is explored extensively elsewhere, with the locus of his geographical imagination rooted within his Potteries childhood, school geography, travel and books.⁷⁰ This helps explain Bennett's enduring interest in geography, but it does not account for the subtle changes in his geographical engagement and of his realisation of the need to attend to the locality of place. Bennett's more enlivened interest in place needs to be located within the discursive communities in which he participates and the manner in which these encourage a more discerning and incisive awareness of the world.

As Drabble remarks, the stylistic quality of *Anna Tellwright* comes from Bennett's widening socio-spatial perception.⁷¹ It is not a novel he could have written had he remained living in the Potteries, for its coherence and emotion depended upon his openness to, and interaction with, other people and places. It also depended upon his ability to compare the affective nature of these experiences. Bennett recognises this power of comparative evaluation, observing that:

[I]n the narrow individualistic novels of English literature...you will find a domestic organism described as though it existed in a vacuum, or in the Sahara, or between Heaven and Earth; as though it reacted on nothing and was reacted on by nothing; and as though it could be adequately rendered without reference to anything exterior to itself.⁷²

Consequently, the profound involvement with place which is emerging in Bennett's work is due to a growing realisation that local distinctiveness only acquires such a hue when actively engaged and juxtaposed with other places. It is not surprising that it is after this period that Bennett comes to place great insistence on fact-finding missions to furnish the substance of his novels, returning regularly to Staffordshire for suitable material. It is this spatial engagement which Bennett's stay with Phillpotts helps crystallise, wherein talking and walking ignite and renew interests, fulfilling what de Certeau terms a transformative agency.⁷³ They lead people to encounter and manipulate space

in new ways, and it is the affective capacity of these practices which make the material and conceptual world possible.

In the years following Bennett's stay with Phillpotts, Bennett's work displays a much greater familiarity with place. Indicative of this is Bennett's best known work, *Clayhanger*, published in 1910, which follows the life of Edwin Clayhanger and his struggle against the insularity of the Potteries. As Bennett records, it is a finely observed piece of work:

This morning at 9.45 I began to write *Clayhanger*. I felt less nervous and self-conscious than usual in beginning a book. And never before have I made one-quarter so many notes and preliminary investigations. I went out for a little recess, and at 1.30 I had done 1,000 words.⁷⁴

Clayhanger displays a greater sense of ownership of textual space, which is imparted through a more affective, engaged characterisation and a more animate sense of place:

Edwin had to readjust his ideas. It had never occurred to him to search for anything fine in Bursely. The fact was, he had never opened his eyes at Bursley. Dozens of times he must have passed the Sytch Pottery, and yet not noticed, not suspected, that it differed from any other pot-works....He never would have thought so but for the accident of the walk with Mr Orgreave.⁷⁵

Bennett's writing is becoming more expressive of the relationships he has with the world and denotes a more intense and active registering of his environs. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that the publication of *Clayhanger* reinforces Bennett's alignment with the Potteries, and strengthens his voice as its regional author.

Conclusion

As Quiller-Couch intimates, the capacity to write well is not the immediate deployment of good style, but rather, a propensity for developing a narrow gamut of ability into a more expansive, responsive approach.⁷⁶ It is about opening up a dialogue between the self and other in the furtherance of one's writing faculties. This mutuality is something, Bondi believes, non-representational thinking must recognise if it is to remain connected to everyday modes of articulating experience.⁷⁷

Hence, exploring practice needs to move beyond the individual as an impermeable entity and appreciate its relationality with people and places. Barton and Hamilton concur, acknowledging that literacy does not just reside in individuals, but in their interaction with the people and places around them.⁷⁸

This is not to argue that literacy is not embodied, but that literacy is embodied through people's awareness of their interactions within the world. Embodiment can only be felt, sensed and appreciated through relationships, through cognition of another.

This is a particularly fruitful way of accessing the historicised nature of embodied practice for it recognises that praxis is not a seamless entity, but is rather composed and made meaningful in those in-between spaces that characterise social relationships: the social, cultural and textual encounters where experience is registered and mediated. Consequently, this enables us to explore past practices through their relational traces and to appreciate that practices are far from discrete. Practices are enmeshed within a multitude of other practices. To write is also to converse, to contemplate, to walk the world. The possible scope of encounters enriches the nature of praxis, making us conceive of practices as having long and varied *durées*.

And so it was for Bennett's writing, a practice that for him was so much more than the act of putting words onto paper. His experience suggests that verbal engagements and the movement of the self are practices which are immanent to textual composition, all combined to provide an artistic stimulus. They facilitate encounters with difference, provoke creativity and open up new social spaces. This demonstrates the circularity of writing practice; it is continuously being refined and reviewed as new encounters bring forth novel perspectives. However, as two practices within a wider repertoire of human practices, they convey only a partial sense of what it can mean to write. Writing remains a complex, often opaque practice and it is through occasional moments of reflection and lucidity that we can begin to define its significance. As Bennett meditates, in his guide to authorship:

It may be asked, finally: What of the actual process of handling the raw material dug out of existence and of the artist's self? There is no process. That is to say, there is no conscious process.⁷⁹

Thus, any approach to the historical geographies of embodied practice must acknowledge and accommodate the elusiveness and contingency of the self, for the circularity of writing is much richer than we can ever realise.

This is necessarily only a limited exploration of writing practice, drawing as it does upon only one author's journals and novels. However, it points the way to a richer engagement in the practice of writing, one which examines the textual conversations authors sustain with one another and the spaces these take place within. Conversation is present within a text through narrative style and references, but conversation occupies a more central position as the precursor to much textual substance. Many authors, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, invited one another to comment upon their work. The result is a prolific correspondence and spatialised conversa-

tion which belies the collaborative and circulating nature of writing. Writing was—and is—a shared experience where social practices fold into one another thereby problematising our very understanding of what it means to write.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Carl Griffin and Adrian Evans for their support throughout the writing of this paper, and to the two anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

Notes

1. David Barton and Mary Hamilton, "Literary Practices," in David Barton, Mart Hamilton and Roz Ivanic, eds., *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context* (London: Routledge, 2000): 7-15.
2. Robert Mayhew, "Materialist Hermeneutics, Textuality and the History of Geography: Print Spaces in British Geography, c.1500-1900," *Journal of Historical Geography* 33:3 (2007): 466-488; Charles Withers, "Eighteenth-century Geography: Texts, Practices, Sites," *Progress in Human Geography* 30:6 (2006): 711-729; David Livingstone, "Science, Text and Space: Thoughts on the Geography of Reading," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30:4 (2005): 391-401; David Livingstone, "Science, Religion and the Geography of Reading: Sir William Whitla and the Editorial Staging of Isaac Newton's Writings of Biblical Prophecy," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 36:1 (2003): 27-42.
3. Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (London: Routledge, 1989).
4. Mary Hamilton, "Expanding the New Literacy Studies: Using Photographs to Explore Literacy as Social Practice," in David Barton, Mary Hamilton and Roz Ivanic, eds., *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context* (London: Routledge, 2000): 16-34.
5. Barton and Hamilton, "Literary Practices."
6. Arnold Bennett, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett, 1896-1910*, N. Flower, ed. (London: Cassell, 1932): 36.
7. Arthur Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920): 45.
8. Diana Pavlec Glycer, *The Company They Keep: C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien as Writers in Community* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2007); Michael Farrell, *Collaborative Circles: Friendship Dynamics and Creative Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
9. Peter Waller, *Writers, Readers and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain, 1870-1918* (Oxford: OUP, 2006).
10. Christopher Hillard, *To Exercise Our Talents: the Democratization of Writing in Britain* (London: Harvard University Press, 2006).
11. Robyn Longhurst, "(Dis)embodied Geographies," *Progress in Human Geography* 21:4 (1997): 486-501.
12. John Shotter, "Responsive Expression in Living Bodies: The Power of Invisible 'Real Presences' within Our Everyday Lives Together," *Cultural Studies*, 18:2/3 (2004): 443-460; John Shotter, *Conversational Realities: Constructing Life through Lan-*

- guage (London: Sage, 1993); 13; Shotter, "Responsive Expression," 444.
14. James Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Steven Shapin, "Placing the View from Nowhere: Historical and Sociological Problems in the Location of Science" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 23:1 (1998): 5-12.
 15. Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (London: University of Chicago Press 1998); Robert Mayhew, "The Character of English Geography, c.1660-1800: A Textual Approach," *Journal of Historical Geography* 34:4 (1998): 385-412; Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1991).
 16. Robert Mayhew, "Mapping Science's Imagined Community: Geography as a Republic of Letters, 1600-1800," *British Journal of the History of Science* 38:1 (2005): 73-92; Michael Curry, *The Work in the World: Geographical Practice and the Written World* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
 17. David Lodge, *The Practice of Writing* (London: Penguin, 1997).
 18. James Kneale, "From Beyond: H.P. Lovecraft and the Place of Horror," *Cultural Geographies* 13:1 (2006): 106-126; Joanne Sharp, "Towards a Critical Analysis of Fictive Geographies," *Area* 32:3 (2000): 327-334; Marc Brosseau, "The City in Textual Form: Manhattan Transfer's New York," *Ecumene* 2.1 (1995): 89-114.
 19. James Ryan, "'Our Home on the Ocean': Lady Brassey and the Voyages of the *Sunbeam*, 1874-1887," *Journal of Historical Geography* 32:3 (2006): 579-604; Matthew Farish, "Modern Witnesses: Foreign Correspondents, Geopolitical Visions, and the First World War," *Transactions of the Institution of British Geographers* 26:3 (2001): 273-287.
 20. Nedra Reynolds, *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2004); Nedra Reynolds, "Composition's Imagined Geographies: The Politics of Space in the Frontier City, and Cyberspace," *College Composition and Communication* 50:1 (1998): 12-35.
 21. Clive Barnett, "Deconstructing Context: Exposing Derrida," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24:3 (1999): 277-293.
 22. Reynolds, *Geographies of Writing*.
 23. William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Secord, *Victorian Sensation*; Johns, *The Nature of the Book*.
 24. Glycer, *The Company They Keep*.
 25. Harold Love, *Attributing Authorship: an Introduction* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002); Johns, *The Nature of the Book*.
 26. *Ibid.*, passim.
 27. Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink* (London: University Chicago of Press, 2007); Miles Ogborn, "Geographia's Pen: Writing, Geography and the Arts of Commerce, 1660-1760," *Journal of Historical Geography* 30:2 (2004): 294-315; Miles Ogborn, "Writing Travels: Power, Knowledge and Ritual on the English East India Company's Early Voyages," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 27:2 (2002): 155-171.
 28. Barton and Hamilton, "Situated literacies."
 29. Michael Wood, *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005).
 30. Bennett only referred to five towns in his fiction and altered their names.

31. Arnold Bennett, *The Author's Craft* (London; Hodder and Stoughton, 1914): 19.
32. Bennett, *The Author's Craft*, 21.
33. Edward Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-world," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91:4 (2001): 683-93.
34. Curry, *The Work in the World*.
35. Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy, "Talking, Creating: Interactional Language, Creativity, and Context," *Applied Linguistics* 25:1 (2004): 83.
36. Bennett, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett*, 96.
37. *Ibid.*, 96.
38. *Ibid.*, 96.
39. *Ibid.*, 30.
40. Shotter, *Conversational Realities*.
41. Margaret Drabble, *Arnold Bennett* (London: Futura, 1975).
42. Bennett, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett*, 98.
43. Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972).
44. Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1987).
45. Shotter, "Responsive Expression in Living Bodies," 446.
46. Bennett, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett*, 96.
47. *Ibid.*, 96.
48. Bennett, *The Author's Craft*, 125
49. Carter and McCarthy, "Talking, Creating."
50. Bennett, *The Author's Craft*, 39.
51. Cynthia Huff, "Towards a Geography of Women's Life Writing and Imagined Communities: An Introductory Essay," Cynthia Huff, ed., *Women's Life Writing and Imagined Communities* (London: Routledge, 2005): 1-16. Barton and Hamilton, "Situated Literacies."
52. Carter and McCarthy, "Talking, Creating."
53. Caroline Desbiens and Sue Ruddick, "Speaking of Geography: Language, Power, and the Spaces of Anglo-Saxon Hegemony," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24:1 (2006): 1-8. Curry, *The Work in the World*.
54. Ryan, "Our Home on the Ocean"; Ogborn, "Geographia's Pen"; Farish, "Modern Witnesses."
55. *Ibid.*, passim.
56. Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust* (New York: Penguin, 2001).
57. John Wylie, "A Single Day's Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the South West Coast Path," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30:2 (2005): 234-47; Jon Anderson, "Talking whilst Walking: A Geographical Archaeology of Knowledge," *Area* 36:3 (2004): 254-61.
58. Bennett, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett*, 172.
59. Solnit, *Wanderlust*.
60. Anderson, "Talking whilst Walking."
61. Bennett, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett*, 96.
62. Wylie, "A Single Day's Walking."
63. John Lucas, *Arnold Bennett: A Study of His Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1974).
64. Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader; Vol. I* (London: Vintage, 2003):149.
65. Bennett, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett, 1896-1910*, 98-99.

66. Arnold Bennett, *A Man from the North* (London: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1994): 98.
67. Arnold Bennett, *Anna of the Five Towns* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975): 123-124.
68. Barton and Hamilton, "Situated Literacies."
69. Bennett, *The Author's Craft*, 11.
70. Brian Hudson, "The Geographical Imagination of Arnold Bennett," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 7:3 (1982): 365-79.
71. Drabble, *Arnold Bennett*.
72. Bennett, *The Author's Craft*, 24.
73. Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1988).
74. Bennett, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett*, 351.
75. Arnold Bennett, *Clayhanger* (London: Penguin, 2000): 126.
76. Quiller-Couch, *On the Practice of Writing*.
77. Liz Bondi, "Making Connections and Thinking through Emotions: Between Geography and Psychotherapy," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30:4 (2005): 433-48.
78. Barton and Hamilton, "Situated Literacies."
79. Bennett, *The Author's Craft*, 65.